

## **Travel report from our week as exchange staff in England 25-30.3.2009, Britt Mattsson & Benita Kottelin**

### **Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> March:**

We started our tour on Wednesday morning by Rosella to Kapellskär. Our departure time to London Stansted wasn't until 6 PM so we had a couple of hours to spend in Stockholm. Since we were allowed only to bring hand luggage there was no interest in shopping so we strolled about in the streets, had lunch and then sat in a café at Kulturhuset and watched people. The whole day was a travel day, it was rather late when we arrived at the airport in London and then we had to wait for the bus which didn't come. After a couple of phone calls we went by taxi to the Clink hostel where the students were going to stay. Benita and I had booked a hotel room at Travelodge next to the hostel at Kings Cross Road. We had supper in the hotel restaurant and then went straight to bed.

### **Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March:**

At 8 o'clock we gathered for the bus trip to Warsash Maritime Academy. It was a lovely day and we watched the wonderful landscape through the bus window all the way down to southern England. Erik guided us as we drove through London. It was rather cold, just a couple of degrees above zero, but it had been warm the weeks before so the leaves and the grass were green and there were lots of daffodils everywhere. Along the road to Warsash we also saw lots and lots of yellow bushes, very beautiful. We had a pleasant journey of about three hours before we reached our destination. We were met by John Bazley, who gave us a presentation of the Warsash Maritime Academy.



John Bazley and his audience

After lunch Benita and I went to the reception and met the nice ladies there, Shellie and Jane. The reception is rather small, we had expected something much larger. Just like at our own reception it seemed to be the centre for the students. Ordinary mail to the students can be collected from the post rack in the Library corridor but recorded or registered deliveries are held in the Reception. The Reception is also a place where every visitor has to register and can leave their luggage in the luggage room. The receptionists watch over the visitors parking place and make sure students or staff don't park there!



Already spring in Warsash

Behind the front desk there are small rooms for other members of the staff. The Accommodation Office takes care of the accommodation for the students, payments for accommodations and other issues. Every accident or injury to a resident must be reported to the Reception or the Duty officers who supervise the office after office time. Both Benita and I were a bit shocked by how cramped the office was. It was like we should be about five persons working in our office at N17! There was not even a toilet in the building!



Jane Nilsen and Shellie Cooper at the Warsash Reception



Members of the staff at Warsash

I immediately noticed the diplomas on the wall behind the girls and I thought this is what Benita and I also deserve! “Outstanding Customer Service Award” and “Customer Feedback Award”. We owe this too! We will have to make a survey.



Shellie took us on a tour around the Campus. We visited the Library, the Health and Fitness Centre which is open every day, the Marketing Office, and a lot of other offices. We also went down to the river and some of the buildings for the workshops.

After dinner we went to the pub with our students and students from Warsash. We had a nice evening with them and our colleagues. It was a great opportunity to socialize and speak English. As being typical middle age I found the music too loud and went to bed rather early!

The accommodation at Warsash was not exactly a five star Hilton hotel. The corridors were smelly and we had to “blip” through a lot of security doors to reach our rooms. We were placed on the top floor, the “Penthouse”, where only women were allowed. I got the room with the view, a nice view over the river but unfortunately it was raining and strong winds made my room rather cold. There were bunk beds but as I was alone I was free to pick the lower one. I was thankful for bringing my own pillow from home; I have a bit of phobia about pillows so I always bring my own, no matter what! Benita got the larger room but with poorer view. The toilet was about five “blip-doors” away! After being told about the safety for the girls with no men allowed in the girls department I was a bit surprised when I woke up in the middle of the night by men’s voices in my corridor! The walls were so thin so I could hear every sound and the girls next door obviously had male visitors! For two hours I lay awake listening to them talking and all I could think about was that I needed to use the bathroom and then I had to go out in the corridor!



My bed at Shackleton, Warsash



My beds at Jury’s Inn

### **Friday 27<sup>th</sup> March**

The whole Friday was spent in Southampton. A taxi picked us up at 9 AM and brought us to our hotel Jury’s Inn, a trip that took twenty minutes, more or less. He dropped us off and luckily we got our rooms and could leave our luggage there. It was just a couple of minutes walk to Southampton Solent University, East Park Terrace. We were met in the Main Reception by Chloe Gilzean, who works with Academic Partnerships Manager Margaret Jenness, our contact during our stay. She escorted us to Margaret who gave a presentation of the University and higher education in the United Kingdom. Then Chloe took us for a guided tour on the Campus. It was so big and with so many buildings so there were maps over the whole campus.



Mandy and Benita at the Main Reception



Alison and Britt at Sir James Matthews

At 11 o'clock we were back at the Main Reception to start our "work"! Benita began there with the ladies Mandy Tyers and Eve Harnett and I followed Chloe to the reception at Sir James Matthews, a five minutes walk across the park. In the reception there Alison Brice-Taylor took care of me for two hours, then we had lunch with Margaret and after lunch we changed places so I spent the following two hours in the Main Reception and Benita went to Alison at James Matthews.

At the Main Reception they take care of the switchboard, both for Solent University and Warsash, post, visitors and every other issue which is part of a reception. The reception at Sir James Matthews is more into courses, conferences and that kind of stuff. This is a smaller and quieter reception, rather too quiet for Alison who sometimes feels a bit alone there. She has no colleague in the reception so when she goes to lunch or a coffee break she needs someone to replace her. We had a lot of fun during our stay at all the receptions. I would say that receptionists are a special kind of people, we have a lot in common. We like to have many irons in the fire, we are service minded, humorous and easy to get on with. We had a great time both in Warsash and Southampton with the nice ladies!

It was almost 5 PM when we went back to our hotel. We were both so tired after a whole day of being alert; speaking English and trying to understand English! Our rooms seemed luxurious after the night in Warsash. After a short break we went for a walk in Southampton. Unfortunately it was raining so we couldn't enjoy to city as much as we would have liked to but we found the Italian restaurant that Margaret had recommended and we had a lovely meal. Back at our hotel I took a quick shower and I was fast asleep before 9 o'clock and so was Benita!

### **Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March**

After a good nights sleep and a full English breakfast we were ready for sight-seeing in Southampton. A very beautiful city in my opinion. We had a park close to our hotel with a fountain and even palm trees. It was a sunny day but rather cold. We walked to the harbour and the Titanic Museum. We also spent a little time shopping! I wish we could have stayed longer in Southampton but we had to get together with our group so in the afternoon we took the train to London, Waterloo Station, and then the Underground to Kings Cross Station.



Benita in the park with Jury's Inn in the back ground



Southampton Maritime Museum

The only incident on this trip happened when we were going to check in at Travelodge. At the reception we found Henrik and Kjell arguing with the receptionist; their rooms was cancelled! It didn't take long to find out that so were our rooms, prepaid a month ago! The receptionist was not very helpful, just referring to his computer which said the rooms were cancelled.



Not until Captain Karlsson gave him the evil eye he began to try to solve the problem. Henrik and Kjell got a room at the Clink hostel and we got two small single rooms at the European Hotel two blocks away, sort of Faulty Towers. At least there was a toilet in the room but sooo small and there was a shower in a closet!



Benita a bit resigned in her room at European hotel  
(notice the torn wallpaper by the bed...)

We were a bit depressed by the situation but we decided to not let this spoil the day. We had wasted a couple of hours on the hotel issue and missed the trip to the Camden Market but instead we had a very nice evening with Henka and Kjell walking about in London and later on Erik joined us at an Indian restaurant.



This is what happens when you share a bottle of wine with Erik at an Indian restaurant (the larger glass is his, of course...)

### Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March

Sunday was devoted to sight seeing. Early in the morning we went by Underground in to City. We were both a bit surprised by the fact that we travelled by Tube like Londoners! No problem, fast and furious (as we read at the commercials on the buses)! Sunday was a sunny day so we left our umbrellas and strolled about in the streets and the parks. Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square and Buckingham Palace, well-known places. Lunch at yet another Italian restaurant, oh we do like the food in England! Another early night at Faulty Towers!



Trafalgar Square



Piccadilly Circus

**Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March**

Wake up call extremely early in the morning. We took a taxi the two blocks to Clink hostel from where the bus to the airport was about to leave because the receptionist at our hotel did not think it was safe for us to walk that time of the night. Bus to the airport at 3 AM, then Ryan air to Nyköping, bus to Stockholm, bus to Grisslehamn, ferry to Eckerö, bus to Mariehamn, taxi home. Puh, home at last at 7 PM. It took a 14 hour journey to get home.

**Summary of the trip**

We both found the exchange trip very useful. It was very good to practise our English skills, both by listening and speaking. Because we have exchange students at Högskolan we have to use English at work and on the switchboard we speak English every week. Later on maybe some of Högskolans courses will be held in English and then its even more important for us to be able to give service in English. It was very interesting to meet administrative staff from other schools and see how they work. We noticed that much of what we do in the receptions are the same. Benita would have been interested in how they handle the course results and the certificates and I would have liked to know about their salaries and wages and also terms of vacation. We were not quite aware of that “reception” there means just reception. Here in our small school we both work in the reception but we also do a lot of other things. We have to know a lot about many different things but in the reception at those large schools there are special offices for every issue and the receptionists take care of the reception.

It was also a lot of fun to be on a trip with some of our students and get to know them a bit better. Overall the trip was a great success and we are very thankful for being given the opportunity to take part.

/Britt